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ABSTRACT

Issues concerning federal assistance to public black colleges and universities are addressed. Attention is directed to the question of whether federal subsidies, given the role of state controlling agencies, automatically benefit black colleges in a meaningful, lasting manner. A second question is whether federal aid to black institutions, in its historical form, is another means of controlling public black colleges and perpetuating their so-called second class status. The relationship between public black colleges and the federal assistance since 1965 is discussed, and examples of state influence and its subsequent negative impact on black higher education are cited. The position is taken that the federal government cooperates with the states to control black higher education by imposing conditions on financial assistance that favor state interests and state management. It is argued that federal assistance regulates and controls public black institutions. Implications of current practices for public black colleges in the 1980s are discussed, and 10 demands that should be enacted to end federal and state collusion are identified, including: the states' role in the distribution of federal funds to black institutions should be eliminated; and all proposals should be considered on merit. (SW)

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FEDERAL ASSISTANCE TO PUBLIC BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: ROBIN HOOD UNLEASHED OR COLLUSION ON THE POTOMAC

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Federal Assistance to Public Black Colleges and Universities: Robin Hood Unleashed or Collusion on the Potomac

by Lewis L. Jones

The allocation of federal dollars to black public colleges and universities is directly related to power and control. Many black colleges have developed a relationship with the federal government that is akin to that imposed upon indigenous populations in developing countries. They are dependent upon the federal government for their survival and have been conditioned to believe that their existence is tied to governmental interference and assistance. Since 1965, most black public colleges have tied their economic fate to federal assistance via basic education programs. In fact, basic education programs have become the most important source of federal funds for black colleges, although those programs represent less than 25 per cent of all federal aid. (Basic programs include student aid, construction aid, land grant college aid, faculty development, and instructional equipment.)

Black presidents have historically assumed that federal assistance is the great equalizer, but they have also complained that federal "intent" gets frustrated by state governments and that distortion of intent undermines the significance of federal aid to their institutions. This paper critiques this process by focusing upon two issues. First, do federal subsidies, given the role of state controlling agencies, automatically benefit black colleges in a meaningful, lasting manner? Second, is federal assistance to black colleges and universities, in its historical form, another means of controlling public black

colleges and perpetuating their so-called second class status? In essence, does the federal government, due to its faith in state agencies, become simply another instrument that controls black higher education? This paper examines these questions by focusing upon the relationship between public black colleges and federal assistance since 1965. It takes the position that the federal government cooperates with the states to control black higher education by imposing conditions on financial assistance that favor state interests and state management. The paper also rejects the great equalizer thesis and argues that federal financial assistance regulates and controls public black colleges and universities.

Historically, most public black colleges have been controlled by all white state governing boards and also under financed at the state level. This uneven distribution of resources has its origins in the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 and continues today. Those white, male dominated bodies often circumvented federal intent and determined the impact that federal funds had on black colleges. The enactment of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, 1964, was an attempt to respond to the distortion of congressional intent, since it required the federal government to suspend grants if a state discriminated against black colleges. A close inspection of the system reveals that the federal government not only failed its "watch dog" function but actually contributed to the problem by its trust in state agencies.

State policy bodies have routinely managed and dispensed federal funds to black colleges in a manner that frustrated their development. Black colleges have complained repeatedly about the

extent of state control over large amounts of federal funds. To understand the impact of that problem, it is only necessary to examine two state controlled mechanisms: 1) state planning boards; 2) regional federal offices.

Until 1965, federal dollars were used to set up state boards for the administration of federal monies at the state level. Perhaps the most striking example of state boards exerting control over federal monies was the allocation of funds for vocational education. The voc-ed bureaucracy was directly tied to the powers of state legislators and governors. States designated administrative agencies for voc-ed programs and, in the process, assumed almost total control of federal funds given to them. Vocational-educational monies provided support for teacher training, curriculum planning and research in the field. Black colleges historically received no support for research and curriculum development, and, comparatively, they also received a disproportionate amount of vocational education funds for teacher training.

Another example of state control frustrating federal intent may be seen in the Tennessee State University case. A 1968 discrimination suit charged the state of Tennessee with maintaining segregation in its public colleges and universities. The 1968 suit sought to block plans by the mostly white University of Tennessee to expand a branch facility in Nashville. Blacks argued that such a facility would compete with Tennessee State for state funds and therefore have the effect of perpetuating the illegal dual system for blacks and whites

and limiting the amount of federal and state assistance to the historically black institution. The court ordered that Tennessee State University (predominantly black) be merged with the University of Tennessee-Nashville (predominantly white) under the governance of the State Board of Regents. Instead, UT-Nashville was expanded, and T.S.U. was prevented from receiving millions of dollars which could have enabled it to become a comprehensive university. The implication of this act was apparent. The state control of financing and the decision of the white dominated state Board of Regents meant that T.S.U. would continue its second class status. It became resegregated and more desperate for financial assistance from federal and state sources.

Two other examples of state influence and its subsequent negative impact on black higher education seem worth mentioning. In Adams V. Califano, the court ruled that "in violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, HEW granted federal aid to public higher education systems which have not achieved desegration or submitted acceptable or adequate desegration plans in ten southern states. The court also required states to locate new schools or programs at universities that would further a unitary system of higher education. In North Carolina, the Board of Governors for the University of North Carolina system decided to establish a School of Veterinary Medicine at predominantly white North Carolina State University at Raleigh with funds provided by the federal and state government. The Board could have satisfied the court's intent by locating the School at predominantly black North Carolina A&T State University. The outcome of its decision was a

School that was populated by an overwhelmingly white faculty and student body and an act that further enriched a white institution at the black one's expense.

A similar pattern was followed in South Carolina. The School of Agriculture at predominantly black South Carolina State College was phased into a Department of Natural Resources. All of the agricultural programs under the old land grant provisions were shifted to predominantly white Clemson University. (Clemson is also the state's white land grant college.) The Board of Governors sanctioned this decision and the impact on black students was immediate. South Carolina State routinely enrolled 100 black agricultural students. After the program was transferred to Clemson University, black enrollment dropped to fewer than six black students. Administrative decisions of this nature further support the position that direct federal supervision of the use of federal funds is required to ensure equitable treatment. They also raise questions about who controls black colleges and universities.

The question of who controls the academic health of black public colleges is directly related to the administration of federal funds. In 1965, a new policy prevented states from using federal money to set up state bodies to administer federal funds. However, black colleges still experienced acts that allowed states to control the distribution of those funds. Those acts can be best described as the regionalization of federal programs. Regionalization of direct federal programs (student aid, Title III) allowed local and state

interests to prevail and essentially accomplish the goals of state management. For example, management personnel of OE offices came from local institutions. Those managers--people who interpreted federal guidelines and made decisions about allocations--were influenced by state government and usually operated according to regional customs and codes.

The critical point here is that people make a difference and regional offices in the South routinely excluded black officers. They also had no blacks in managerial positions. One example illustrates the problem. The OE in Washington, D.C., routinely had several black officers; the office in Atlanta had one in the late 60's and early 70's. The absence of blacks did not automatically create an unfair situation; it ensured however that blacks would not be involved in interpreting federal guide-lines that directly affected black colleges.

A more striking example of how regionalization works against black public colleges is the manner in which decisions are made about the allocation of college student aid. College student aid officers usually get invited to workshops to familiarize them with complex application forms and funding procedures.

Regional staff frequently know the local college personnel and select review panel members from among friends. This group reviews all application data for accuracy and validity. Next, the review panel reads each proposal and recommends a total amount of "approved" request from each college. This is a major step in the process.

Panelists judge their peers' application in a clubby atmosphere, and the skill in penetrating the "ole boy" network becomes just as important as drafting proposals and compiling documentation. It is especially crucial to black institutions, since the action of the review panel determines their level of funding. The adverse impact seems almost predictable.

The negative ramifications are obvious for black colleges and universities, since federal support for those institutions still comes under the strong influence and management of state governments. Black colleges get overwhelmed by staff and review panel membership, and the administrative patterns at the regional level exclude many black college personnel from key sessions or major committee membership. Administrative decisions at the regional level are just as important as congressional appropriations or legislative intent. Historically, compliance procedures have never been rigorously applied to higher education programs administered at the state level. (Federal grant recipients must simply file a compliance statement with each grant request.) The current emphasis on block grants to states should not make public black colleges more optimistic. Instead, it should cause some distress among those who are responsible for the fiscal and academic integrity of those institutions.

A central theme of this paper is that federal funds are often used to suppress the development of public black higher education. If one examines how federal regulations are applied to black colleges and universities, that assumption does not seem implausible. In fact, the

federal government, like its state counterpart, becomes a major controlling force. Consider another example of suppression: federal indebtedness.

Colleges must usually match any federal funds with monies from other sources. This is necessary in order to maintain the previous year's spending. The problem with this requirement is that black colleges accelerate expenditures yearly. If enrollment becomes static or if funds from other sources do not increase yearly, they face a rising cost spiral that negates cost-saving strategies. This problem can be traced directly to complex regulations and excessive requirements to meet compliances. Black colleges are penalized for sound management, since every dollar must be spent in order to increase federal allocation in the ensuing fiscal year. The real achievement of federal subsidies to black colleges is the perpetuation of the prevailing class system in higher education. Consider federal allocations to all colleges and universities in FY 1975; federal funding to colleges generally increased .2 per cent. The federal government awarded 4.9 billion dollars to all institutions of higher education. The 109 black colleges received 240 million dollars or 4.9 per cent. During 1974-75, federal funds to black colleges declined 13.8 per cent despite an enrollment increase of 5.5 per cent at those institutions. The result is suppression of thoughtful planning instead of promoting the healthy development of black higher education.

Cumbersome federal regulations not only stifle fiscal responsibility but also negatively affect the academic quality of black colleges. Entrance requirements are often lowered at those institutions in order to meet the quota for receiving large amounts of aid. An investigator can go into any college work study file and find many violations of those cumbersome federal regulations. Consequently, black colleges are caught in an impossible dilemma. On the one hand, they need the federal money to survive; on the other hand, they must deliberately lower standards in order to meet arbitrarily imposed federal regulations. It is obvious that the politics of federal assistance to black college supersedes qualitative considerations. The question, then, becomes: what are the implications of these practices for public black colleges in the 80's and what should be done to end federal and state collusion. Black administrators ought to demand the enactment of the following demands immediately.

One, they should emphatically demand that the state's role in the distribution of federal funds to black institutions be eliminated outright. Two, they should demand a process that ensures that all proposals will be considered on their merit. Three, they should insist that blacks be appointed to panels that read, review and make decisions on funding proposals submitted by all institutions. Four, they must insist that review committees include curriculum specialists from black colleges and the black community. Five, they should insist that the federal government forgives 50 per cent of all loans to black colleges during the next ten years. Six, they should insist that

federal student aid funds be allocated in a lump sum and that black colleges, with appropriate federal review, develop their own procedures for distributing funds to students. Seven, they should demand that federal funds be monitored by independent auditors who have special instructions from the federal government. Eight, they ought to demand a ten year moratorium on matching requirements for federal funds. Nine, they should insist upon multi-year funding (e.g. 5 year periods) so that the quality of various programs can be established. Ten, black administrators ought to demand that federally sponsored workshops to up grade management skills become a part of their approved grant.

The essence of this paper is that public black colleges, in order to serve their mission, must eliminate state control of federal resources. This should become their highest priority in the eighties, since white controlled state agencies have historically frustrated congressional intent. Unfortunately, the federal government itself has cooperated (willingly in some cases, unwillingly in others) with the states through ambiguous language, indifference and abdication of its supervisory role. The federal government, by its cavalier behavior, joined the states in suppressing the development of public black colleges and universities.

The 1980's will demand a new relationship/partnership between public black colleges and the federal government. The aforementioned ten points is a good start, but a radical departure from historical practices is needed. Despite the current administration's love affair

with block grants and state prominence in policy initiatives, it is obvious that public black colleges must call for the elimination of that model with respect to federal assistance. The block grant model, coupled with state supervision, perpetuates a system where the quality of public black colleges ebbs and flows according to the generosity of people outside those institutions. A more realistic alternative would be to eliminate the role of state government in federally sponsored programs at black colleges and allow those institutions to exercise direct control over basic programs. They should be allowed to deal directly with the federal government and be accountable to the national office, since regionalization is tantamount to serving local and state interests.

Public black colleges and universities will continue for a long time; it could reasonably be argued that they should exist indefinitely. Consequently, the ability of those institutions to selectively improve both programs and educational standards is inextricably connected to the direct control of federal funds. The excellence of public black colleges and universities also depends upon their collective identity as a respected force in the academic community and their willingness to press demands and obtain political concessions that will allow them to exist in an environment conducive to sustained growth and development. Otherwise, it will be impossible to reverse the second class treatment imposed systematically on them by the federal and state government in such a way to compel poor performance and maintain their place at the lower rungs of the higher education community.

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